

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

September 13, 2006

**Contacts: Lori Nordstrom 406-449-5225 ext 208
Diane Katzenberger 303-236-4578**

DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION FOR THE CANADA LYNX RELEASED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis estimating costs related to the proposed critical habitat designation for the Canada lynx and related conservation actions at \$175 million to \$889 million over the next 20 years. In releasing the analysis, the Service also reopened the public comment period on the proposed critical habitat for the lynx.

The Canada lynx is protected under the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species. In November 2005, the Service released its proposal to designate 18,031 square miles of critical habitat for the species.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Areas designated as critical habitat for the Canada lynx include portions of northern Maine, northeastern Minnesota, the northern Rocky Mountains (northwestern Montana and a small portion of northern Idaho) and the Okanogan area of the northern Cascades in north-central Washington. Lynx are highly specialized predators of snowshoe hare and depend on boreal forest habitat to support their home ranges.

Activities affected by critical habitat designation for the lynx may include timber management, recreation, development, public land management and conservation planning, transportation, utilities and municipal projects, and administrative costs related to consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service regarding potential project impacts.

Timber-related impacts, including care and cultivation of forest trees and restricting pre-commercial forest thinning, comprise 91 percent of the total potential costs. Other estimated costs are associated with recreation (between \$1.05 million and \$3.06 million),

public land management and conservation planning (\$12.8 million), transportation, utilities and municipal projects for conservation activities (between \$35 million and \$55 million), future mining projects (\$430,000) and administrative costs (\$9.03 million) over the next 20 years. Impacts relating to other land use activities including residential and commercial development were not quantified as information was not available to describe how these activities may be modified for the benefit of lynx.

In conjunction with the economic analysis, the Service released a draft environmental assessment which broadly evaluates the social and cultural effects of the proposed critical habitat designation.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

The Service is seeking comments and information from the public on all aspects of the proposal, including data on economic and other potential impacts of the designation. Specifically, comments are also solicited regarding the following:

- (1) The reasons any habitat should or should not be determined to be critical habitat as provided by section 4 of the Act, including whether it is prudent to designate critical habitat;
- (2) Specific information on the amount and distribution of lynx habitat in the contiguous United States, and what occupied habitat has features that are essential to the conservation of the species and why and what unoccupied habitat is essential to the conservation of the species and why;
- (3) Comments or information that may assist us with identifying or clarifying the Primary Constituent Elements (PCEs);
- (4) Land use designations and current or planned activities in areas proposed as critical habitat and their possible impacts on proposed critical habitat;

- (5) Any foreseeable economic, national security, or other potential impacts resulting from the proposed designation and, in particular, any impacts on small entities in timber activities, residential and commercial development, recreation, and mining;
- (6) As discussed in this proposed rule, we are considering whether some of the lands we have identified as having features essential for the conservation of the lynx should not be included in the final designation of critical habitat if, prior to the final critical habitat designation, they are covered by final management plans that incorporate the conservation measures for the lynx (i.e., the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) (Ruediger et al. 2000), or comparable). In particular, seven National Forests and one Bureau of Land Management (BLM) district are in the process of revising or amending their Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP) to provide measures for lynx conservation. It is anticipated that all of these plans will be complete prior to promulgation of the final critical habitat designation. As a result, all National Forest and BLM plans would have measures that provide for conservation of lynx, and consequently will not be in need of special management or protection.

Comments may be submitted to: Field Supervisor, Montana Ecological Services Field Office, 585 Shepard Way, Helena, Montana 59601. Comments may also be sent by e-mail to fw6_lynx@fws.gov (include RIN 1018-AU52 in the subject line). Copies of the analysis may be obtained by downloading it from <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/mammals/lynx>. Comments will be accepted until October 11, 2006.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.